



A.G. on Ag
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An Update from Secretary Kawamura

September 2006: Disaster Recovery, Bird Flu, State Fair, Presentations & Ag Education

This month I am participating in heat wave [disaster town hall meetings](#) in Tulare (9/6) and Stanislaus (9/14) counties where the focus is on agricultural recovery from the damaging effects caused by our recent heat spell. Other local, state and federal government officials were invited to these sessions, including county departments of emergency services, the [California Office of Emergency Services](#), Federal Emergency Management Agency, Small Business Administration, USDA's Farm Service Agency and California Disaster Assistance Loan Program. Farmers, ranchers and local emergency officials gave their assessment of heat-related impacts. County agricultural commissioners provided estimates of the heat damage to agricultural commodities. The effects of the weather on agriculture have taken a heavy toll on our livestock and crops, but I am determined to keep the pressure on the federal government for disaster relief. [Governor Schwarzenegger](#) requested relief for farmers and ranchers and USDA Secretary Johanns has announced [16 counties](#) are now eligible to be considered for emergency loan assistance. The California delegation can proceed with federal legislation to provide relief.

Shifting the focus to [bird flu](#), CDFA is now heading "Health Issues Associated with Avian Influenza," a working group of state and federal regulators who have primary responsibilities in the areas of human and animal health, wildlife management and emergency response. Our team is developing guidelines to assist other state and county agencies

should high-pathology bird flu (H5N1) be detected in wild bird populations or poultry flocks in this state. Dr. Richard Breitmeyer, state veterinarian, invited officials of the California Department of Health Services, California Department of Fish and Game and Governor's Office of Emergency Services, to join with the CDFA and address common policy issues and to develop consistent messages if this dangerous bird flu does occur here. The California Environmental Protection Agency, Governor's Office of Homeland Security and California's Occupational Health and Safety Agency also contributed to the development of these materials. Our knowledge and understanding of this virus continue to grow in detail, so additional information will be added in the future. Names of contacts and trusted information sources will also be included in these documents.

I'm very pleased with the efforts of more than 140 CDFA employee-volunteers that resulted in an entertaining and educational booth at the [State Fair](#) this summer. "***Super Foods come from California***" was the theme. A spin-the-wheel contest and [trading card](#) prizes both featured the state's top ten food commodities. Many children and adults said strawberries and avocados were among their favorite [California-grown](#) foods. This year more than 940,000 people attended the fair, offering CDFA an opportunity to reach out to the public and promote the importance of good nutrition and the



(L-R) Chris Keeler, District Director, USDA-Farm Service Agency; Assemblyman Bill Maze (R-Visalia) and Secretary Kawamura at the Tulare County Agricultural Disaster Recovery Town Hall Meeting. Photo: E. Williams, CDFA

many contributions California agriculture makes to our state's economy.

This month, at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo's College of Agriculture, I was invited to deliver the keynote address at the "[Festival of Fruit](#)," the annual gathering of the California Rare Fruit Growers. More than 300 growers, 50 FFA and 4-H members, and special guests came to the event. The range of rare fruits successfully produced here is a testament to our varied microclimates and the innovative spirit of small-scale growers throughout the state. To protect our agricultural industry and ensure it continues to send these high-quality commodities to the marketplace, we must not let down our guard against exotic fruit flies, root weevils and other serious plant pests and diseases.

I invite you to attend the next [State Board of Food & Agriculture](#) meeting at Modesto Junior College on Wednesday, September 27th. Al Montna, president of the board, has organized a panel composed of members of the California Community College Board of Governors, state agencies, Farm Bureau and the agricultural industry, in partnership to address workforce readiness and the key role our educational institutions play in training students for technical careers in agriculture. Community colleges project a major shortage of these graduates over the next decade. The inability to fill vacant positions will impact our industry's ability to remain competitive in the marketplace.



Secretary Kawamura speaks to Cal Poly-SLO FFA members, part of the next generation of California agriculture leaders. Robert Lilley, SLO County Agricultural Commissioner, is on the right. Photo: J. Henderson / CDFA



Students at Locke High School in Watts prepare to plant in their campus garden. Photo: J. Henderson, / CDFA

And finally, I'd like to let you know about a very special event *next month*. On Saturday, October 21st, Locke High School in Watts will be the setting for the opening celebration of [California School Garden Week](#) (October 23-27). The Locke students have been busy getting their garden in shape to show to visitors. I feel strongly about the importance of introducing children to gardens in public schools and cultivating their interest in growing and enjoying nutritious foods. I encourage you to support your local school gardens and urban agricultural education.

As always, thank you for your support. Feel free to contact my office with any questions or concerns.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A.G. Kawamura".

A.G. Kawamura
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